

Reading: scanning texts

SPOTLIGHT CHECKLIST

PAPER 1, PART 4 Scanning texts for information

Tips

- Read the questions carefully, to make sure that you understand any detail or opinion expressed.
- Scan the text to locate the section which expresses the ideas in the particular question.
- Disregard parts of the text which may seem to reflect similar ideas but do not express the whole of the question.

Practise:

- scanning texts for specific information, such as dates and times, rather than reading the whole of the text;
- reading a wide range of articles and reviews in which different people discuss work, books, films etc.

- 1 **PAPER 1, PART 4** You are going to read an article on the science of persuasion. For questions 1–15, choose from the sections (A–D). The sections may be chosen more than once.

In which section are the following suggested?

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|---|----------|
| • the means of communication affects how easily someone can be persuaded. | 1 _____ |
| • a positive, confident attitude helps you to be more convincing. | 2 _____ |
| • people can be more easily persuaded when they're tired. | 3 _____ |
| • women respond more positively to personal contact. | 4 _____ |
| • how you say something is more important than the words you use. | 5 _____ |
| • certain tactics fail once people understand what you're trying to do. | 6 _____ |
| • making people feel bad about themselves is not an effective means of persuasion. | 7 _____ |
| • you should avoid confrontation after a hard day's work. | 8 _____ |
| • communication by email can be more effective between highly competitive men. | 9 _____ |
| • people who are angry about an injustice can be manipulated. | 10 _____ |
| • asking your target to perform a mental task before you approach your main subject can be effective. | 11 _____ |
| • you should instil a sense of urgency in your target's mind. | 12 _____ |
| • men and women are essentially different in the way they communicate with members of their own sex. | 13 _____ |
| • you should convince people there's a solution to their problem. | 14 _____ |
| • self-control plays a major role in how susceptible someone is to persuasion. | 15 _____ |

The Science of Persuasion

Psychologists have long been fascinated by persuasion – why some people are more persuasive than others and why some strategies work where others fail. We bring together some recent insights into the science of persuasion.

Reporting by Dan Jones and Alison Motlun

A Hunger is a powerful thing, but how many times have you reached for a quick snack, only to regret it when it's lying heavily in your stomach? Just as your standards for food quality can slip when your stomach is empty, so you should avoid engaging in argument or doing battle with sales people when your mental batteries are running low. Conversely, if you're trying to be persuasive, strike when your target is running low on mental energy.

Edward Burkley of Oklahoma State University in Stillwater studied the impact of cognitive exhaustion on the resistance levels of 78 students. The plan was to try to convince them to accept one month's summer holiday instead of three. Half the students came to the study fresh. But the other half first had to complete a self-control task in which they wrote down all thoughts that came into their heads while suppressing any thoughts about a white bear.

This task, Burkley argued, would use up some of their reserves of self-control. He found that the students who had performed the white bear task were less resistant to the idea of giving up two months of holiday.

B In this fast-paced world, we seldom have time for face-to-face meetings. Rosanna Guadagno of the University of Alabama and Robert Cialdini of Arizona State University have been comparing the persuasive power of online communication with face-to-face meetings.

In a study published in 2002, Guadagno and Cialdini had a group of students discuss the introduction of new exams. The group was split

into same-sex couples. Unbeknown to the subjects, each pair included an accomplice of the experimenters whose role was to provide arguments in favour of the idea. Half the discussions took place in an online chatroom, the other half sat face-to-face.

While overall men rated the proposals similarly whether they participated in the electronic or face-to-face sessions, women in face-to-face sessions rated them more highly than those who only took part online. Guadagno and Cialdini suggest this is because groups of women tend to form communal bonds and reach agreement. Electronic communication disrupts the exchange of social cues women use to establish a communal bond and is therefore less conducive to persuasion.

On the other hand groups of men typically try to establish their competence and independence, which can lead to competitive encounters. When two men who have not met before debate a point, online interaction is about as persuasive as face-to-face. But if they have met and had a competitive exchange, subsequent face-to-face meetings are less productive, whereas online exchanges fare far better. So while online communication can prevent women 'connecting', it can help men suppress competitive urges that hamper persuasion.

C It was midnight when the knock came at the door. It was 'Paul', a 'neighbour', who'd 'just moved in'. He spoke non-stop, without pause or hesitation, detailing a problem with a truck that had run out of gas and his need for \$20, which he would, of course, return first thing in the morning. Later, Kurt often looked back and wondered just how it was he got taken in so easily. 'Paul' was a master of his craft: Kurt later learnt that four other people on the street had also been taken in by the con.

Maybe we shouldn't be so surprised when things like this happen. Persuasion, it turns out, may have as much to do with how you say something as what you're saying. And the less time you're allowed to think about the content, the more the style of delivery matters. At least, those are the findings of two marketing professors who decided to tease style and substance apart.

John Sparks at the University of Dayton in Ohio and Charles Areni at the University of Sydney, Australia, asked 118 undergraduates to read a transcript of a testimonial about a scanner. In one version, the speaker used hesitations like 'I mean' and 'ummm'; in the other, he used none. They also gave half the students enough time to read it thoroughly, while the others got just 20 seconds, to see how limiting a person's understanding of the substance would alter the persuasiveness of the style.

The researchers found that in both versions style was important. When hesitant language was used, people

were less easily convinced that this was a scanner worth buying – even when it was a better scanner at a lower price. Style was especially important, the researchers found, when time was limited. 'If you can't pay attention to what the speaker is saying,' Sparks says, 'you pay attention to how they say it.'

D Angering people may seem like an odd way to go about persuading them, but according to Monique Mitchell Turner, a communications professor at the University of Maryland, College Park, it is seriously underrated as a tool of persuasion.

Much study has gone into how emotions aid persuasion. The best known and most studied is fear. It serves well in campaigns that try to steer you clear of certain activities, like smoking. But fear doesn't always work, says Turner, and over time, people become more resistant to scare tactics. The same applies to guilt. It can be effective (think of maternal guilt), but not once people clue into the fact that they're being manipulated. Worse, it has to be carefully calibrated: too much and people resist. 'We don't want people telling us we're bad people,' says Turner.

Anger is different. For one thing, it's focused on someone else's misdeeds, not your own. Also, it's a very utilitarian emotion, she says, usually in response to a perceived injustice. 'Anger makes people feel empowered,' Turner says. There has been a long debate, she says, about whether anger can be constructively harnessed. In studying groups that employ anger as a tactic – most notably animal rights groups such as *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals*, as well as environment organisations and even political campaigns – she has found that, given the right conditions, it can.

First, people have to be convinced that the issue is relevant to them, that it affects them or their children or their community. At that point, says Turner, you need to hammer home what's wrong with the world as it is. Once you have got people roiled up, you can offer them a way to remedy the situation.

